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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to give an updated perspective on teenage parents. It is suggested that, from the late 1960's to the early 1980's, thinking about the issue of adolescent parenting has shifted away from viewing teen parents primarily as intrapersonally and interpersonally deficient, from conducting teen-parent studies in a bivariate linear manner, from regarding teen-parent programs only at the micro-level, from studying only the teen mother, and from gathering global measures of development. The discussion focuses on these shifts by examining: (1) causes and effects of teen parenting; (2) programs and support systems designed to meet the needs of adolescent parents; (3) studies focused on the role of the teen father; and (4) research related to in-depth analyses of dyadic interactions between teen parents and their young children. Implications are drawn for those whose role it is to support adolescent families. To gain information, approximately 300 sources were reviewed. Over 90 percent of these sources either discussed the causes and effects of teen parenting or reviewed programs for adolescent parents. The remaining 10 percent described the role of the teen father and the dyadic interactions between teen parents and their children. Recommendations based on the review are offered. (RH)

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Becoming and Being a Teen Parent--

A Literature Review

by

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The pregnancy rate among adolescent women has increased in the last thirteen years. For example, in the state of Minnesota, among women aged fifteen to nineteen years of age, the pregnancy rate increased thirty-seven percent, while the overall pregnancy rate for all women decreased seven percent. Of 12,000 pregnancies in the adolescent population, in this time period, thirty-two percent resulted in births to married teenagers; twenty-five percent, out-of-wedlock births; forty-three percent, induced abortions or fetal deaths. In 1980, there were over 5,700 births to fifteen to nineteen year old mothers, yet only 400 marriages occurred in the same year among this group of mothers. (Minnesota Center for Health Statistics, 1982; Spadaccini and Whiting, 1983).

At the national level, according to the Vital and Health Statistics data (Ventura, 1980), there has been an increase in the illegitimacy rate for teenagers, particularly those aged fifteen to seventeen years (17.1 per thousand births in 1973, as compared to 19.3 per thousand births in 1976). This has occurred at a time when the overall illegitimacy rate has been declining. In 1975, over fifty-two percent of illegitimate infants were born to mothers under twenty years of age. Since 1976, the birth rates for women aged fifteen to nineteen years has remained constant, although the numbers have increased. In the United States in 1976, about 1,222,000 women fifteen to nineteen years of age were married, divorced, or separated. Of these, 480,000 were mothers of at

least one child and 332,000 were never married mothers. Over ninety per cent of the unmarried adolescents giving birth kept their infants (Spadaccini and Whiting, 1983).

The purpose of this report is to give an updated perspective on the portion of teenagers whose pregnancies resulted in live births. From the late 1960's to the early 1980's, there have been gradual shifts in thinking, shifts away from 1) viewing teen parents primarily as intra- and interpersonally deficient, 2) conducting teen-parent studies in a bivariate linear manner, 3) regarding teen-parent programs only at the narrow micro-level, 4) studying only the teen mother, and 5) gathering global measures of development. This essay will focus on these shifts by examining 1) the causes and effects of teens becoming parents, 2) the programs and support systems designed to meet the needs of adolescent parents, 3) the studies focused on the role of the teen father, and 4) research related to in-depth analyses of the dyadic interactions between teen parents and their young children. Implications will then be drawn for those whose role it is to support adolescent families.

To gain this perspective, almost three hundred information sources were reviewed. Over ninety percent of these sources either discussed the causes and effects of teen parenting or reviewed programs for adolescent parents. The remaining ten percent described the role of the teen father and the dyadic interactions.

#### From Deficiency to Adequacy--The Causes and Effects of Becoming a Teen Parent

##### Early Studies

In the 1960's and early to middle 1970's, following earlier anthropological findings (Osofsky, 1968), unmarried teenage mothers were usually depicted as

being at risk and inadequate. Intrapersonally, they had not resolved Oedipal conflicts and were often emotionally disturbed and impulsive. They had improperly formed ego structures, poor reality testing and low self-esteem; (Hussain and others, 1976; Juhasz, 1974; Meyerowitz and Malev, 1973; Mecklenburg, 1973; Miller, 1974). Interpersonally these mothers exhibited a symbiotic relationship with their own mothers and had poor interfamilial interaction; they were not involved in church or school activities, often being truant. Further, they frequently engaged in sexual activity, acted out, and experienced societal rejection (Connell, 1971; Curtis, 1974; Gottschalk, Titchener, Piker, 1964; Mecklenburg, 1973; Meyerowitz and Malev, 1973; Plinois, 1975; Segal, 1973). The pregnancies were usually unplanned or seen as a means to escape an unhealthy home situation. Psychological and cognitive factors blocked the conversion of birth control knowledge into successful practice (Coblner, 1974):

#### Studies in the 1970's

Researchers in the latter part of the 1970's continued to find some of the inadequacies cited earlier (Blau, 1979; Hertz, 1977; Kaplan and others, 1979; Sugar, 1976). The focus of research became increasingly multifaceted as environmental factors, comparative studies, and follow-up investigations added to an increased understanding of teen parents and their children. The findings of studies which examined the dynamics of income, family background, and socioeconomic status were sometimes contradictory. In a follow-up study of 400 families in Baltimore, children of adolescent parents had less stress and higher self concepts than children of older mothers, yet they had lower academic achievement and more psychosocial problems (Hardy and others, 1978). In another study, comparisons of the children of younger and older mothers, both of low socioeconomic status, showed no significant differences in test scores, behavior and

social adjustment ratings, school cumulative record data, or the attitudes and practices of parents (Cohen and others, 1979; Morrow, 1979, Wutka, 1977).

Several studies examined the effects of the lives of the adolescent unmarried parents themselves. Truncated schooling, reduced occupational attainment, lower income level, greater job dissatisfaction, more children than desired, possible early marriages ending in dissolution--these were some of the effects noted (Cannon-Bonventre and Kahn, 1979; Card and Wise, 1979; McKenry, Walter, and Johnson, 1979; Moore and Hofferth, 1978; Presser, 1975; Sugar, 1976).

Societal forces were found that related to a concentration of illegitimacy in the teen and pre-teen years--increasing unstigmatized sexual activity, decline in the double standard of morality, improving physical health and earlier maturation, decreasing numbers of forced marriages, and the possible use of contraceptives (Chilman, 1976).

#### Studies in the 1980's

In the 1980's some research studies continued to place emphasis on the intrapersonal factors which indicated psychological need among unmarried adolescent parents (Colletta, 1982; Brown, Adams, and Kellam, 1981; Falk, Gisper, and Baucom, 1981; Rogeness and others, 1981a). However, several 1980's studies found no systematic differences in the psychological makeup of unmarried teen parents and their peers (Pettapiece, 1980; Peabody and Patrick, 1981). When socioeconomic factors were controlled, researchers in the 1980's found few or no differences in babies born to adolescent mothers as compared to older mothers (Chilman, 1980; Finkelstein, 1982; Garcia, Sepkoski, Lester, 1982; Gunter and Labara, 1980; Roosa, Fitzgerald, Carson, 1982 a; Roosa, Fitzgerald, Carson, 1982 b). Health complications were found among young (under 14) adolescent parents who

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had more premature deliveries and neonatal deaths (Elster and McArarney 1981; Finkelstein, 1982). In contrast to earlier vital statistics analysis reports, Rothenburg and Varga (1981) found that children of younger mothers as compared to children of older mothers had higher Apgar scores at birth and scored better on the total and fine motor sections of the Denver Developmental Screening Test.

Other conclusions were reached in a longitudinal study with over 1000 persons (Howell and Freses, 1980). Neither socioeconomic origins, parental child-rearing techniques, academic abilities, nor preadolescent aspirations were related to unmarried adolescent parenthood. Sex, race, and a maternal fatalism paradigm (women's roles are to be mothers) were the significant factors in this adult role transition. In the area of child maltreatment, several dynamic variables were present for both older and younger mothers. However, adolescent child abusers were more motivated by situational factors such as financial stress, where older person had more intrapersonal problems (Bolton and others, 1980). The "illegitimacy runs in families" hypothesis was questioned by Field and others (1980).

Overall, the emphasis in research has shifted from the portrayal of an at-risk adolescent to a person who is potentially capable but greatly influenced by factors in a larger society. Perhaps this change parallels the change in value paradigms in the macro-system. When stigmas for out-of-wedlock births were more prevalent, it appears that intra- interpersonally needy adolescents became pregnant or at least these persons were more accessible to researchers. Serious examination of the extra-personal factors, such as socioeconomic status, became possible when unmarried pregnant adolescents from a greater variety of background increasingly became more available for study.

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From Micro-program to the Broader Context--Programs and Support Systems  
for Adolescent Parents--Overall Programs

Much of the research on programs for unmarried adolescent mothers and their effects has been descriptive and short-range rather than experimental and longitudinal. Nevertheless, program patterns do emerge from various studies. The majority of programs, whether based in schools, medical facilities, or community social service agencies; whether public or private, were interdisciplinary and comprehensive in nature (Bennett and Bardon, 1977; Braen and others, 1969; Casey, 1974; Dawdy, 1969; Goodman, 1968; Hartman, 1970; Kyu-Taik, 1981b; Lewis and others, 1975; Levenson and others, 1979; Los Angeles, 1967; Klein, 1975; Magrab and Danielson, 1979; Palmer, 1981; Rogeness and others, 1981 a; Washington, 1975). Organizationally, a variety of formats such as the following appeared to be possible: home-based, home-based with group meetings, home-based with follow-up mailings, extended-family centers, maternity homes, day care and educational experience at school sites; group education with hotline; networks of services. (Badger, 1980; Benas, 1975; Kyu-Taik, 1981a; Sharpe, 1975; Smith, 1975; Stone, 1975; Truss and others, 1977.)

Specific Program Considerations

Several matters seemed to be specific to various years. Many programs in the 1960's were therapy rather than educationally focused (Balsam and Lidz, 1969; Clark, 1967; Dawdy, 1969). In the 1970's therapy intervention continued, but seemed to be primarily utilized by the minority of teen parents who were psychologically quite needy. (Benas, 1975; Bomar, 1975; Golant, 1980).

In the latter part of the 1970's special education was provided to adolescent parents as their right rather than their privilege (Slavik, 1975).

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Programs were developed for tribal girls and bilingual students (Choices and Careers, 1977; Hollinshead, 1975). The special needs of handicapped and pre-term infants and their adolescent parents were addressed (Levenson, 1978b; Field, 1980).

### Program Criticisms

Criticism of both social service and educational programs in general occurred in the 1980's. Zellman (1981) stated that 1) schools do not seek or want an active role in student pregnancy or parenthood; 2) special programs are usually dependent on the dedication of a single individual; 3) quality is uneven within and across programs; 4) each special program model, whether included in, supplementary to, or extra curricular is unable to meet the diverse needs to pregnant adolescents; 5) pregnant students make most decisions about pregnancy and school continuation without school staff input; 6) few programs conduct outcome evaluations that look at the long-term results of their efforts.

Cartoof (1982) stated that AFDC maintained dependency and weakened the family support system and Brown (1982) cited the inadequacy of social services, particularly as they relate to the economic well-being of the adolescent parent.

In the 1980's also, researchers began to focus on the importance of the teen mother's family support system. The adolescent's own mother, particularly after pregnancy was confirmed, appeared to be a significant figure in filling the adolescent's own developmental needs as well as buffering the effects of single parenting for the infant (Eleanor Smith, 1975; Rosen, 1977). In one study, sixty-four percent of ninety-eight teen mothers stated that their own mothers were their main sources of emotional support as well as providing an excellent model for child rearing (Epstein, 1980). Financial and emotional

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assistance allowed the teen mother to finish school, to be more socially involved, to exhibit high educational achievement and economic advancement (Colletta, 1981 b; Furstenburg, 1978, 1980). Further, the support provided by a relative and/or the teen father were the most consistent predictors of quality maternal behavior (Colletta, 1981 b). Concern was expressed about staff attitudes toward teen parents and the need for staff to have an understanding of the developmental tasks of both adolescents and infants and toddlers (Bierman and Bierman, 1978; Daniels, 1969; ~~Lowenson~~ and others, 1978a).

#### Summary of Programs

Increasingly, recognition of the moral and social importance of the wider context in which the teen parent is embedded has led to concern with providing better education, housing and employment. Roosa, Fitzgerald, and Carson (1982 a) have suggested a multivariate predictive research paradigm as an aid in understanding teen parents from a broader viewpoint. Fisher and Scharf (1980) in their anthropological, sociological, and psychological overview have stated that successful programs seem to replicate what anthropology has observed about those cultures that have to deal with pubertal mothers--that is, that modeling, rule giving, and nurturance create a "holding environment" in which adolescent mothers can be properly nourished and learn to hand down this new experience to their own offspring. The study of individual program formats and variables needs to be considered in dynamic relationship to the rest of society.

#### From Mother Only to the Inclusion of the Father

Of the nearly three-hundred references used as a basis in this review, less than five percent considered the adolescent father. Three studies done in the late sixties and early 1970's sought to 1) help the father in couple counseling; 2) glean information about the birth father for future adoptive parents, and

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3) provide help in employment, education, and contraception, especially for fathers forced into early marriage (Howard, 1971; Shubin, 1968; Price, 1971).

Several studies reported in the late 1970's and the early 1980's focused on the characteristics of the father as a person, the father's role with both the mother and child, and the support systems available to the father. Although one set of interviews portrayed the father as frightened, withdrawn, and confused (Barret and Robinson, 1981a), other studies emphasized the importance of the father as caregiver and playmate in enhancing the infants' cognitive and social-emotional development as well as serving as support for the mother. Over fifty percent of expectant fathers expressed the desire for continued involvement with the mother and infant, and almost twenty-five percent were actually involved twenty-six months after the birth of the baby (Barret and Robinson, 1982b; Earls and Siegel, 1980; Hendricks, 1982; Lorenzi, Klerman, and Jekel, 1977).

Adolescent fathers appeared to turn overwhelmingly to their families of origin for support rather than personal friends, teachers, clergy, or social service agencies (Hendricks, 1980).

Even though a beginning has been made in the consideration of the importance of the father, Robinson and Barret (1982) have suggested that the study of adolescent fathers is confused or neglected in research and advocates a closer, multivariate examination.

#### From Global Measures of Development to Interactional Dyadic Analysis

Paralleling the larger, society, researchers in the late 1970's and early 1980's have begun to look the dyadic interactions between teen parents and their young children and factors that affect the quality of this interaction.

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McLaughlin and others (1979) found, among other things, that black non-users of day care showed more positive interactional behaviors than those who used day care. Hofmeier (1980) suggested that enhanced psychomotor development was a function of the responsive vocalizations of teen mother and infant. Wise and Grossman (1980) stated that ego strength, pediatrics, and infant temperament were closely related to the quality of attachment and interactional pattern among teen parents. Carlson (1983) found correlations between sensitive adult styles and cooperative child styles in teen parent/child dyads. In the same study, passive child styles were related to directive and withdrawn teen parent styles.

This current focus of research has indicated the significance of studying the subtleties of interaction among teen parents and their offspring.

#### Summary and Implications

The emphasis in research over the last fifteen-twenty years related to teen parenting has shifted from the portrayal of a deviant, psychologically needy, unmarried adolescent to a person who is sometimes very capable but greatly influenced by societal factors. The study of individual program formats to meet the needs of teen parents has broadened to include the dynamic interrelationship between single programs and conditions in the larger society--education, housing, employment, medical care, and day care. A new appreciation of the role of the teen mother's mother and/or family support system has arisen. Consideration of the teen father as a "source-of-information" only has shifted to acknowledgement of him as a person who can make significant contributions to the welfare of his child. Paralleling the larger society, microanalyses of the interactions of teen parents with their offspring has also begun. Sensitive interactive styles among parents were related to cooperative child styles, and

withdrawn and directive parent styles were related to passive child styles.

Specific recommendations that emerge from the research include the following:

1. Teen mothers could be viewed as individuals with considerable strengths. Although the intra- and inter- personal needs of many of the teen parents cannot be overlooked, program planning could identify and build on the strengths of each of the teens.
2. Programs to meet the needs of teen parents need to make impact on the broader societal context in which the adolescent lives. Needs related to housing, employment, day care, medical care, and educational opportunities need to be addressed before education in specific parenting skills will be meaningful.
3. Programs to meet the needs of teen parents could consider the adolescent's own mother and family as well as the father of the baby as important and crucial components.
4. A responsive, dyadic, turn-taking interaction has been considered necessary in enhancing the development of young children. This same responsive turn-taking could form a significant psychological and philosophical framework for the interactions of program staff with teen parents.

If comprehensive programs cannot be maintained, then many teen parents will continue to have uncompleted education, welfare dependency, divorce, and reduced potential for meaningful employment and life fulfillment.

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